Equality: Putting the Theory into Action

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Abstract

We outline our central reasons for pursuing the project of Equality Studies and some of the thinking we have done within an Equality Studies framework. We try to show that a multi-dimensional conceptual framework, applied to a set of key social contexts and articulating the concerns of subordinate social groups, can be a fruitful way of putting the idea of equality into practice. Finally, we address some central questions about how to bring about egalitarian social change.

Keywords: egalitarianism, equality, institutional design, political strategy, social justice, social systems

Equality: Putting the Theory into Action

Since the 1970s, political philosophy has been dominated by the issue of social justice. The questions involved have become more and more sophisticated and the answers more and more arcane. This is a perfectly understandable course of development and is a symptom of the maturity of the debate, but one of its costs has been an increasing difficulty in making connections between the philosophical literature and the practical problems involved in designing social institutions and policies. An even wider gap exists between the political theory and the political practice of bringing about social change. The idea of equality studies is a response to these disconnections. It is a way of trying to bring together theoretical, explanatory, practical and strategic questions about equality in a coherent way. Our book *Equality: From Theory to Action* attempts to illustrate in print what this project might look like.[1] We hope that the content of what we have to say is worthwhile, but we also hope that the very exercise of dealing with a wide range of questions in a single place demonstrates the importance of connecting them together. In what follows, we explain something about the idea and origins of equality studies and we outline the main ideas we have developed in our book.

The idea of Equality Studies

In the mid-1980s, University College Dublin (UCD) was going through a period of development planning and ideas for new courses were being encouraged. A group of us from a range of disciplines and departments saw this as an opportunity to construct a postgraduate programme that brought these different disciplines together thematically around the idea of

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[1] John Baker, Kathleen Lynch, Sara Cantillon and Judy Walsh, *Equality: From Theory to Action* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), which elaborates on all of the arguments put forward in this paper and acknowledges the many people who have contributed to this project. All page and chapter references in the text are to the book, where detailed references to the literature informing our perspective can be found.

equality.[2] Initially we conceived of Equality Studies as a 'pluridisciplinary' programme, i.e. one in which students would do courses in sociology, law, economics, political theory, feminist theory, development studies, social policy, education and so on. Our early PhD students also tended to work pretty much within the bounds of established disciplines. It was only as we got on that we started to see that the whole project had an intellectual coherence that went beyond the individual disciplines and was truly interdisciplinary.

In our book we try to demonstrate that coherence, largely by example rather than by theorising it. Insofar as we do theorise it, we say that equality studies deals with six key questions or tasks: (1) describing patterns of inequality, (2) explaining inequalities, (3) developing principles of equality, (4) designing egalitarian institutions, (5) formulating egalitarian policies and (6) devising political strategies for bringing these aims to fruition (pp. 14-17). Of course, each of these questions tends to be the focus of one or more established disciplines, but it is rare for any one discipline to cover the full range of these questions, and to the extent that they are covered, they tend to be discipline-specific. What we found by experience is that by thinking about these questions in the same space, and by bringing the approaches of different disciplines into contact with each other, we each got a better insight into how to go about answering them.

Equality Studies as it is practised in UCD is of course very much shaped by the particular backgrounds and competences of those of us who are involved in it. We would surely have developed a different programme as well as different research if we were different people coming from different disciplines. But that is true of every academic department and every research project. In the rest of this article, we provide a brief overview of the ideas and themes we have developed.

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[2] For an account of how and why the Equality Studies Centre was set up, see Kathleen Lynch, *Equality in Education* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1999), ch. 3. Information about the Centre is available at http://www.ucd.ie/esc.

The New Equality Agenda

No one can deny that most of us live in very unequal societies in a very unequal world. The scale and character of inequality varies quite a lot from one society to another and from one social division to another. Decades of empirical research have mapped material inequalities at both national and global levels and show, for example, that the distribution of income in some countries is markedly more unequal than in others. The distribution of income globally, even allowing for differences in purchasing power, is nearly as unequal as in the most unequal countries. This material inequality is reflected in differences in mortality and morbidity (pp. 3-5).

Material inequalities, however, only make up some of the important inequalities in industrialised countries and in the world as a whole. As a number of theorists and social movements have emphasised, there are also important inequalities of respect and recognition: inequalities in the relative status of members of different groups, expressed in the varying degrees of esteem and contempt that they show towards one another and that social institutions and structures embody. Such inequalities can be observed in the relations between men and women and in the ways that dominant groups treat disabled people, ethnic minorities, working class people and lesbians, gays and bisexuals. Individuals and groups also vary, sometimes quite considerably, in the access they have to relations of love, care and solidarity and the degree to which they are subjected to converse relationships of abuse and violence. We need only think of the way children, older people and prisoners have been abused in a range of institutions to see how dramatically and importantly people's situations can differ in this dimension of inequality. These striking inequalities are closely connected to inequalities of power, but power inequalities are important in their own right. Relations of dominance and subordination are typical of many social divisions, including those of gender, ethnicity, sexuality, disability and class. Yet another type of inequality relates to conditions of

and opportunities for working and learning. Privileged groups have better working conditions, better opportunities for successful and satisfying work, and better chances for worthwhile learning (pp. 5-8).

As this overview makes clear, inequalities have some obvious patterns, with some groups being privileged relative to others. They are the effect of social structures rather than the random outcome of individual choices. So it is not surprising that the question of inequality has been thrust onto the political agenda, as well as into academic discourse, by social movements of people who find themselves on the wrong end of inequality. Nor should it surprise us that the renewed preoccupation of political philosophy with social justice, and in particular with equality, should have coincided with such social movements as the Civil Rights movements, the women's movement, gay liberation and the disability movement, as well as with the post-war resurgence of the labour movement. These movements have had a profound impact on other disciplines, such as sociology, as well as on the development of new fields of study like women's studies and disability studies. We see equality studies as the logical next step in these developments. On the one hand, it attempts to bridge the gap between normative and empirical study. On the other, it attempts to integrate the study of equality and inequality across all of their key dimensions, and across all significant social divisions. This is the new equality agenda that has emerged from social movements and needs to be pursued in both academic practice and political action (pp. 8-14).

A central part of the academic challenge is to develop a framework for theory and action that is rich enough to encompass different approaches to equality and the different concerns of egalitarian activists. Table 1 summarises the conceptual framework we propose for this purpose. It makes two cross-cutting distinctions. First of all, it distinguishes between what we call three different *conceptions* of equality: basic equality, liberal egalitarianism and equality of condition. Basic equality is the idea that every human being deserves some basic minimum

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of concern and respect, placing at least some limits on what it is to treat someone as a human being. Liberal egalitarians hold a wide range of views, but typically assume that there will always be major inequalities and that our aim should be to manage these fairly, relying on higher minimum standards and some version of equal opportunity. Equality of condition sets out a much more ambitious aim: to eliminate major inequalities altogether, or at least massively to reduce the current scale of inequality. With respect to each of these conceptions of equality, but especially the last two, we also distinguish five key *dimensions* of equality: (1) respect and recognition, (2) resources, (3) love, care and solidarity, (4) power and (5) working and learning. These dimensions of equality reflect at a theoretical level the different preoccupations that crop up over and over again in the politics of egalitarian social movements. Although they are clearly one kind of answer to the question 'Equality of what?', they occur at a different theoretical level from the answers typically found in the philosophical literature. Those more philosophical answers have implications for the disposition of respect and recognition, resources and the rest of the dimensions of equality, but in our view these dimensions are sufficiently distinct and important to justify putting them at the centre of a systematic approach to the theory and practice of equality, rather than treating them as secondary (ch. 2).

Table 1. Basic equality, liberal egalitarianism and equality of condition

Dimensions of equality	Basic equality	Liberal egalitarianism	Equality of condition
Respect and recognition	Basic respect	Universal citizenship	Universal citizenship
		Toleration of differences	'Critical interculturalism': acceptance of diversity; redefined public/private distinction; critical dialogue over cultural differences
		Public/private distinction	
			Limits to unequal esteem
Resources	Subsistence needs	Anti-poverty focus	Substantial equality of resources broadly defined, aimed at satisfying needs and enabling roughly equal prospects of well-being
		Rawls's 'difference principle' (maximise the prospects of the worst off)	
Love, care and solidarity		A private matter?	Ample prospects for relations of love, care and solidarity
		Adequate care?	
Power relations	Protection against inhuman and degrading treatment	Classic civil and personal rights	Liberal rights *but* limited property rights; group-related rights
		Liberal democracy	Stronger, more participatory politics
			Extension of democracy to other areas of life
Working and learning		Occupational and educational equal opportunity	Educational and occupational options that give everyone the prospect of self-development and satisfying work
		Decent work?	
		Basic education	

The radical ideal of equality of condition differs from the views of liberal egalitarians in all five dimensions. It calls not just for the toleration of differences, but for a 'critical interculturalism' that encourages the members of different social groups to engage in a mutually supportive but critical dialogue from which everyone can learn. It envisages a world in which people's overall resources are much more equal than they are now, so that people's prospects for a good life are roughly similar. It aims for social conditions under which people would have ample prospects for loving, caring and solidary relationships. It promotes equality of power not just in the formal political system but throughout society. It demands that the burdens and benefits of work should be much more equally shared and that the conditions under which people work should be much more equal in character. And it calls for ensuring that everyone has access to forms of learning that contribute to their self-development in the broadest sense (pp. 33-42).

Our endorsement of equality of condition is based largely on the familiar point that the aims of liberal egalitarians are undermined by inequalities of wealth, status and power that they refuse to challenge: for example, that Rawlsian 'fair equal opportunity' is impossible to achieve in a deeply unequal society. We also draw on arguments exposing the internal contradictions of liberal egalitarianism and its limited assumptions and scope.

From a normative perspective, a key question is how these ideas of equality are related to a number of other ideals, such as human rights, social inclusion, freedom, solidarity and the protection of the environment (ch. 3). In the context of this article, all we can say is that we think that there are strong reasons for seeing equality as a pivotal concept in articulating progressive political ideals and that this is what justifies focusing on equality as an organising principle for both theory and action.

How does this theoretical framework relate, in general terms, to the categories sociologists have developed for analysing inequality? Our way of answering this question is

to concentrate on four central social systems as contexts of egalitarian change. In line with the sociological tradition of Marx, Weber and Parsons, we distinguish the economic system from the cultural system and the political system. However, influenced by feminist theory, we also emphasise the importance of the affective system - the system concerned with providing and sustaining relationships of love, care and solidarity (pp. 58-62). Table 2 summarises our analysis of these four systems.

Table 2. Key contexts of equality and inequality

Key Social Systems	Central functions of each system	Systems and institutions with prominent roles in each key system
Economic	Production, distribution and exchange of goods and services	Private sector producers and service providers State economic activity (transfers, public services, etc.) Voluntary sector service providers Cooperatives Trade unions
Cultural	Production, transmission and legitimation of cultural practices and products	Educational system Mass media Religions Other cultural institutions (museums, theatres, galleries, concert halls, etc.)
Political	Making and enforcing collectively binding decisions	Legislation/policy-making system Legal system Administrative bureaucracies Political parties Pressure groups Campaigning organisations Civil society organisations
Affective	Providing and sustaining relationships of love, care and solidarity	Families Friendship networks Care-giving institutions (children's homes, old people's homes, etc.) Care-giving networks (in neighbourhoods, workplaces, etc.)

In attempting to connect up this social-theoretical analysis with our conceptual framework, we came to an unexpected conclusion. For although the four social systems tend to focus on different dimensions of equality, we came to recognise that it was more accurate

to see each of them as containing inequalities in all five of the dimensions we had identified. Thus, for example, the economic system contains not just inequalities of resources, but also inequalities of respect and recognition, inequalities of power, inequalities of working and learning, and inequalities in people's access to relations of love, care and solidarity. The five-dimensional account of equality and inequality therefore cuts across the fourfold taxonomy of social systems and can be used to investigate equality and inequality in each of these systems as well as in other contexts.[3]

One of the interesting questions that arises from this framework of analysis is whether the systematic inequalities experienced by different social groups are generated by different social systems. The question is of more than scientific interest, since it helps to identify the systems that particular social movements should prioritise in trying to bring about a more egalitarian future. To take an example, it seems clear enough that the inequalities experienced by working class people are generated by the economic system, even though they also face systematic inequality in the cultural and political systems and encounter specific dangers in the affective system through, for instance, their greater risk of homelessness and imprisonment. For lesbians, gays and bisexuals, it seems more plausible to maintain that the inequalities they experience are generated by the cultural system, in which 'sexual deviance' has been portrayed in many cultures as immoral. Although they are implicated in a range of economic inequalities, including discrimination in employment, bullying in the workplace and barriers against the development of solidary relations with fellow workers, it seems likely that these are the effect of cultural forces. Addressing this issue of the causation of inequality in connection with other groups, and in relation to the multiple identities created by the cross-cutting divisions of gender, class, disability, ethnicity and sexuality, is a challenging task of both intellectual and political importance (pp. 65-71).

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[3] John Baker, 'Equality: What, Who, Where?' *Imprints* 9/1 (2006) 29-41.

Putting Equality into Practice

One of the standard complaints levelled against egalitarians is that it is all very well to complain about the inequalities of the world, but that we have done little to say what an alternative world would look like. The complaint is far from justified: egalitarian social visionaries have imagined alternatives to existing unjust societies since antiquity. And yet, as circumstances change and as our understanding of social systems improves, it behoves us to imagine afresh and to update our conceptions of a just social order. Within the Equality Studies Centre, our specific disciplinary backgrounds are in economics, politics, law and the sociology of education. It is therefore in these areas, and in our common experience as researchers, that we have chosen to spell out some of the ways that equality of condition could be promoted through institutional change. That task inevitably involves us in some discussion of the ways that inequality has been analysed by our home disciplines and of the economic, political, legal, educational and research practices that have reinforced and reproduced inequality.

In contemporary economics, the neoclassical approach constitutes the dominant intellectual paradigm. Impressed by the explanatory power of its central models as well as by the efficiency of market mechanisms, neoclassical economists have tended to explain inequality as the inevitable and beneficial result of market relationships, reflecting in particular the unequal human capital that workers bring to the labour market. To be sure, there have always been more critical approaches, including the Marxist analysis of capitalism as a system of exploitation. From this point of view, inequality is neither just nor efficient (pp. 78-82).

Recent research on the relations between equality, growth and efficiency has added a new dimension to these debates. Large scale empirical research has shown that greater economic inequality is actually associated with lower economic growth, although the reasons

for this relationship are disputed (pp. 82-4). At a more theoretical level, there has been compelling criticism of the view that redistribution through taxation and social welfare payments is inherently inefficient. In particular, serious questions have been raised about the alleged effects of taxation and transfer payments on personal motivation and about the supposed 'deadweight losses' incurred by redistributive taxation (pp. 84-7). These criticisms open the way to constructing plausible models of more egalitarian economies.

One of the more radical models for bringing about greater economic equality is the idea of market socialism, defined by Roemer as 'any of a variety of economic arrangements in which most goods, including labour, are distributed through the price system and the profits of firms, perhaps managed by workers or not, are distributed quite equally among the population'.[4] Although such models attack the inequality of wealth at the heart of capitalist economies, they call for very fundamental changes in their structure. A more immediately feasible way of establishing greater economic equality is to rely on the neocorporatist models of social partnership between the state, employers, trade unions and other stakeholders that already exist in some countries, including Ireland. This form of economic planning has the potential to bring about much greater equality. The central problem it faces is lack of consensus on greater equality as an objective of social policy; it is this lack of consensus, rather than purely 'economic' factors, that explains why Irish social partnership has presided over widening inequality. Of course, the conditions of contemporary capitalism create formidable ideological obstacles to establishing such a consensus. But this is a political problem, not something that is dictated by economics (pp. 87-95).

Turning to the political system, we know from casual observation, confirmed by political research, that decision-making in nearly all spheres of life is controlled by elites composed primarily of members of dominant groups. Institutionalising equality of condition in the

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[4] John Roemer, *Equal Shares: Making Market Socialism Work*, ed. Erik Olin Wright (London: Verso, 1996), p. 13.

political system would therefore have to involve much more participatory forms of democracy, incorporating six key features. First of all, they would involve the widespread participation of ordinary citizens in decision-making. Secondly, they would necessitate a thorough democratisation of society, extending beyond what is now considered politics to the practice and ethos of all major social institutions, particularly businesses, schools, churches and families. We are not claiming that all of these bodies should be under state control, or even that they should all be legally required to adopt democratic forms of governance, but simply that egalitarians should try to extend democratic relationships throughout society rather than to confine them to formal government. This second feature is closely tied to a third, namely that participatory forms of democracy must be rooted in a democratic social ethos. A proper democracy cannot be a question of institutions alone, but depends on the attitudes and values of its members. Of course, in such a society the pervasiveness of democratic decision-making would make it impossible for every citizen to be deeply involved in every type of political affairs. For this reason, a fourth key feature of a participatory democracy is that participation at all levels should be representatively diverse. In particular, a participatory democracy would seek to ensure effective and roughly proportionate participation by members of social groups that have traditionally been marginalised. Fifthly, since any feasible form of participatory democracy would involve the use of elected representatives, it is important to develop accountable forms of representation based on consultation and dialogue between representatives and their constituents. Finally, participatory forms of democracy need to be communicatively rich. Their members should talk to each other through personal testimony, passionate rhetoric, detached analysis, song, debate, poetry: the whole gamut of human communicative forms (pp. 96-101).

This vision of participatory democracy faces a number of obstacles. Some of these seem to be intrinsic to the very idea of a strong democracy, and include doubts about the

capabilities of citizens, alleged impracticalities, and the tyranny of the majority. Others are primarily the effect of inequalities in other social systems. In relation to the intrinsic obstacles, we would argue that modern citizens really are capable of doing what participatory democrats call on them to do, because the very process of developing a participatory society would improve the knowledge, skills and commitments of citizens. We believe that a proper system of accountable representation, drawing on the 'delegate' model but containing a number of important revisions and clarifications, is consistent with the principles of participatory democracy and is the key to ensuring its practicality. We maintain that the traditional equation of democracy with majority rule is mistaken, and that there are several means by which political systems can protect vulnerable minorities if they are determined to do so (pp. 101-13). The difficulties involved in establishing participatory forms of democracy within deeply unequal societies are more formidable, and reflect the interrelations between political, economic, cultural and affective inequalities. Nevertheless, experience of participation in a variety of settings suggests that real progress can be made on the political front, and that this can in turn help to bring about greater equality in other systems (pp. 113-17).

The legal system is another important context for equality, because it regulates all other social institutions and is located at the intersection of state and civil society. Although some social movements have made effective use of litigation in pursuing egalitarian aims, the system as a whole has tended to reinforce inequality. The apparent impartiality and independence of the courts masks the fact that they are constantly engaged in political rather than purely technical judgements. Their rulings typically sustain inequalities not just through their material effects, but also through the ideological or symbolic effects of their language and form, privileging certain perspectives and forms of knowledge and excluding others. These inequalities are exacerbated by the fact that legal systems physically exclude those

who lack the means to access the courts and in any case effectively exclude those who lack the legal training to participate in their processes of decision-making (pp. 118-23).

One way of making the legal system more egalitarian would be to build on the practice of systems that allow courts to consider a wide range of relevant evidence, especially through the use of *amicus curiae* briefs filed by interested third parties and of sociological and other contextual information. Such evidence, especially if based on emancipatory forms of research (as discussed below), could allow for the inclusion of a much wider range of perspectives and forms of knowledge than is currently allowed in the courtroom in most cases. These procedures would of course have to be adequately resourced, and to be supported by appropriate training for judges and lawyers. Concerns about the democratic mandate and institutional competence of courts should not prevent them from considering questions of distributive justice, but could be addressed by re-working judicial review remedies (pp. 123-5).

One of the areas of law most relevant to egalitarians is legislation prohibiting discrimination in the workplace. These laws tend to exhibit several interrelated features. First, they are subordinate to the operation of market-based economies and reinforce a public/private dichotomy to the detriment of particular groups. Secondly, they focus on individual justice rather than group relations. Thirdly, their reliance on the idea of a comparator limits their relevance to many disadvantaged groups. Because, fourthly, they are based on the assumption that justice requires ignoring certain socially prominent differences, they treat positive action as exceptional and open to challenge. Finally, even when they do require positive action, anti-discrimination laws have had a severely limited impact on inequality (pp. 125-32).

Some recent developments contain the seeds of an approach that would help to inject the idea of equality of condition into employment law. Two examples, adopted in a number of

jurisdictions and particularly prominent in Canadian and South African jurisprudence, are requirements to provide reasonable accommodation for subordinate groups and positive duties to promote equality in the workplace. These changes are significant because they acknowledge the experiential knowledge of subordinate groups in the form of procedural rights and require proactive equality auditing of working conditions (pp. 132-9).

A fourth social system that has enormous significance for equality is the educational system. The formal, compulsory sectors of education in particular play an important role in society and are open to democratic scrutiny and refashioning. Schools currently reinforce inequality in all of the dimensions set out above, but they also have the potential to contribute to a more egalitarian society.

Starting with inequalities of resources, and in particular with inequalities tied to social class, it is clear that schools are engaged in a wide range of inegalitarian practices. Cross-national research shows that the most effective response to the role of schools in reinforcing class-based inequality is to reduce the degree of economic inequality in society generally. But within the educational system itself, greater equality could be achieved by abandoning rigid grouping policies, challenging the power of upper and middle class parents in relation to both selection and grouping, and changing curricula and assessment systems to make them more inclusive of the wide range of human intelligences (pp. 144-54).

One of the main inequalities that many groups experience in education is lack of respect and recognition. Three educational practices are particularly important here: a general silence or invisibility that is often accompanied by devaluation or condemnation, a systematic bias in the syllabus and practices of schools, and segregation into different classes or schools. Schools need to develop much more inclusive processes for respecting and recognising diversity not only in their organisational cultures, but also in their curriculum, pedagogy and assessment systems. They need to adopt and act upon the principle of critical

interculturalism, i.e. to take a critical, interactive approach to other people's beliefs, lifestyles, values and institutionalised practices - to their cultures in the broadest sense of the term - rather than simply allowing differences to coexist or merely tolerating them. They need to educate their staff and students about the equality-specific issues that arise in relations of social class, gender, ethnicity, ability and other differences (pp. 154-61).

Inequalities of power are central to the organisation of most schools. Yet democratising education is important, not just because students themselves are increasingly opposed to hierarchical forms of control and authority[5] but also because of the role schools play in preparing students for democratic citizenship. At the level of teacher-student relationships, democratisation involves substituting dialogue for dominance, cooperation and collegiality for hierarchy, and active learning and problem solving for passivity. At the level of school and college organisation, it involves institutionalising and resourcing democratic structures such as student and parent/community councils that exercise real authority and responsibility. It also requires initiating new systems of dialogue among students, teachers, parents and local communities (pp. 161-3).

The educational system is an important site for promoting equality of love, care and solidarity. Yet education has neglected this task, by neglecting not just the emotions these relations involve but the emotions generally. Schools therefore need to develop an appreciation of the intrinsic role that emotions play in the process of teaching and learning. They need to provide a space for students and teachers to talk about their feelings and concerns. They need to devise educational experiences that will enable students to develop their emotional skills or personal intelligences *per se*, that is, as a discrete area of human capability (pp. 164-8).

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[5] This emerged very clearly in our research with second-level students in Ireland: Kathleen Lynch and Anne Lodge, *Equality and Power in Schools: Redistribution, Recognition and Representation* (London: RoutledgeFalmer, 2002).

The final question of egalitarian practice that we should like to discuss here is how to conduct academic research. Although this may seem a more parochial issue than how to structure the economic, political, legal or educational systems, research plays an important role not only in academic institutions but throughout society. The questions that are chosen for research and the ways that research is conducted and used can have significant effects on inequality. Yet for the most part, even researchers with clearly egalitarian aims have tended to operate within the research paradigm of positivism, an approach that emphasises the distinction between facts and values, the collection of independently verifiable and objective data and the use of scientific and particularly, though not exclusively, statistical methods to interpret this data. This type of 'political arithmetic' has been crucially important for holding the state publicly accountable, but it is open to philosophical and moral criticism and is of limited value for understanding and challenging the oppressions it documents. The fact that academic research takes place within the privileged context of universities and research institutes, which are themselves characterised by hierarchies of status, power and resources, is another factor that has to be addressed if we want to use research for social change (pp. 169-78).

An alternative approach has emerged from the work of feminists, disability activists and other progressive authors, namely the idea of emancipatory research. Emancipatory research involves a recognition of the moral right of vulnerable, marginalised or oppressed research subjects to exercise ownership and control over the generation of knowledge produced about them and their world. It requires the development of a reciprocal, democratised relationship between academics and marginalised groups so that the research process enables participants to understand and change their situation. Such reciprocity should apply not just to the collection of empirical data, but to research planning and design and to the development of normative and explanatory theories. This idea of emancipatory research poses numerous

challenges, including initial power imbalances between academics and members of subordinate groups as well as the extra time and resources that are necessary to develop trust and to support real dialogue. But these obstacles are well worth trying to overcome (pp. 178-83).

Within current discussions of emancipatory methods, the choice about whether or not to use these methods is left to the researcher. To institutionalise a truly radical approach to research would require the development of new structures, such as the establishment of Research Coalitions with marginalised groups and communities. These coalitions would design and monitor research from conception to implementation, based on principles of mutual respect and equal power. To be truly effective, they would need to be combined with Learning Partnerships dedicated to expanding the knowledge and understanding of both sides of the partnership. A third institutional component would be the routine development of Equality Action Plans that aim to use the results of research for social change. Such changes are of course difficult to envisage in a world where universities are increasingly subject to the power of transnational corporations and the pressures of privatisation, but they set out a vision that can help to guide egalitarians in the design and implementation of research programmes (pp. 183-6).

The issues discussed in this section are of course only a fragment of the egalitarian agenda, chosen on the basis of what we feel we are best equipped to talk about. Some of the areas conspicuous by their absence are the family, criminal justice, the mass media and the global economic order. But we hope we have addressed a wide enough range of issues to indicate what an appropriate treatment would look like.

Strategies for Change

How should we think about promoting egalitarian change? The account of change that has had the most influence on egalitarians comes from Marxism, with its emphasis on the

conflict of interests between the capitalist and working classes. While acknowledging a debt to the Marxist tradition, and recognising the importance of class divisions as generative forces for social change, we think that a model of social change for our times should highlight the pluralistic character of contemporary egalitarian social movements. On this model, social change occurs through the complementary actions of a large number of groups, only some of which are formally organised. Some groups work primarily 'within' the formal political and bureaucratic system using 'acceptable' methods while others work primarily 'outside' the system using radical, disruptive tactics. Their focus can vary from personal to local, national or transnational concerns, sometimes targeting and sometimes by-passing the state. The motivations of activists are typically a mixture of self-interest and moral commitment, drawing on the existing ethical ideas of their societies but challenging hypocrisy and other value-contradictions within them. They achieve their aims not just by appealing to the interests of subordinate groups, but by emphasising the injustice and immorality of existing social arrangements, as well as by pointing out ways that even members of dominant groups have something to gain from the changes they are seeking (pp. 191-5).

In our view, many contemporary social movements can be viewed as participants in a broader equality movement, because they are concerned with challenging inequalities in one or more of the dimensions set out in Table 1. As a broad and diverse movement, the equality movement clearly has its tensions and conflicts. But these should not hide a fundamental affinity of aims that provides a basis for cooperation on a wide range of issues (pp. 194-201).

The strongest argument for a wider, social movement model of change is to analyse both the weaknesses of class as the sole force for egalitarian change in today's world and the potential of other groups to contribute to this change. We cannot do so in any detail here. Suffice it to say that class politics in today's world faces a wide range of obstacles. These

include the fact that many inequalities are determined by nationalist as well as by capitalist interests, that the working class itself has changed dramatically, that large groups of people have little connection to paid work, that there are important divisions within classes, that many people have ceased to identify themselves as working class, that being working class is culturally depreciated, that class politics contains key internal contradictions and that class structures vary across times, cultures and countries. Class politics remains important, but it can no longer be seen as the only defining element of the equality movement (pp. 201-7).

To bring about egalitarian change, then, we need to look to all of the subordinate social groups in our societies, each of which is the basis of a social movement with its own dynamics. Consider, in particular, the women's movement. Gender-based inequality is as ubiquitous in human societies as class-based inequality. Yet like the labour movement, the women's movement has made major advances in the struggle for equality. The rising power of women, and the fact that women are not completely marginalised despite their relative disadvantages, mean that women are particularly well placed to play a leading role in the equality movement. Admittedly, women are themselves a diverse group within which there are serious conflicts. But women also have some important common interests. In particular, the issue of affective equality, in which care work plays a central role, is an equality theme that not only unites most women but also has political relevance to men. It is a narrative around which people can mobilise, because it evokes strong emotions and affects everyone at least at some times in their lives. Yet it only enters public discourse in many countries when governments seek to entice women out of unpaid care work and into the formal economy. The task is to place affective equality on the political table, to name it and give it political legitimacy and significance (pp. 207-11).

All of this raises the issue of the importance of ideology not just in maintaining inequality but in achieving social change. Ideology belongs to the symbolic realm, the set of

cultural codes though which the world is interpreted and defined. It is a particularly important field for resistance in contemporary societies because of the way power is diffused through planet-wide systems of information and communication. There is always a struggle over cultural codes, a struggle that takes place in many sites that interface with politics and the economy, particularly within the informal networks and unregulated and decentred systems of civil society. There are cracks and contradictions that can be exploited for ideological challenge and resistance. Some of the very ideas that dominant groups use to justify their privileges are capable of being turned against them, and to this extent at least, they never exercise complete ideological hegemony. Those who challenge oppression do not have to invent entirely new systems of values and beliefs, because they can always find footholds in the belief structures of their own societies (pp. 212-18).

The first challenge that has to be met in developing a powerful political ideology of resistance is to identify core political concerns within a society around which it is possible to mobilise dissent. We believe that an egalitarian perspective drawing on the ideas set out above, and especially the ideal of equality of condition, can play an important role in this project. First of all, it makes a clear rupture with the dominant neoliberal justifications for inequality. Secondly, it integrates the project of socialism with cognate projects of feminism, disability rights, human rights, ethnic and minority rights and other equality-oriented movements. In this regard it creates a common bond across a diverse but deeply interdependent range of interests. It gives interrelated, but frequently unaligned, social movements a common language and set of projects, words and deeds that can unify them in an intellectually cogent and logical manner. Thirdly, the discourse of equality defines these social movements as principled movements with a political purpose that goes beyond self-interest, rather than as sectional interest groups. Fourthly, egalitarianism provides an overarching framework whereby the pursuit of social, economic and cultural rights is

naturally integrated with the promotion of civil and political rights. Fifthly, egalitarianism taps into a number of powerful emotions including love, solidarity, empathy, pride and indignation. Finally, egalitarianism is rooted in the political traditions and cultures of democratic countries and of wider regional and global contexts, reflected in such documents as the European Convention on Human Rights, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Charter of Principles of the World Social Forum (pp. 218-19).

Among the many egalitarian narratives that can serve as ideologies of resistance, one of the most under-rated is the narrative of affective equality, and particularly its principles of equality of love, care and solidarity and of an egalitarian sharing of care work. The ideas of love, care and solidarity resonate with both old and new social movements. The issues of care and of the emotional work underpinning it are also of increasing importance in the 'quality of life' debate internationally. These are themes about which people feel deeply. Yet affective relationships have been put under pressure by a range of economic and demographic developments including the casualisation of employment, the relative powerlessness of organised labour to protect workers' care interests in a globalised market order, global migration and the increased commodification of the work involved in love and care. These factors show that there is no fundamental conflict between the narrative of love, care and solidarity and the classical materialist narrative of exploitation, but that the two are complementary and intertwined (pp. 219-20).

What makes the theme of affective equality particularly powerful is not just that it has so many connections with our deepest emotions and with contemporary social developments but also that it is so central to the concerns of the women's movement. Admittedly, issues about care were first brought to the political agenda by more conservative women who framed them as a conflict between the traditional caring role of women and their increased participation in paid work. But more recently, feminist scholars and activists have come to see that the issue

of caring does not have to be construed in this way: that it raises more radical questions about the divisions of labour between men and women, the conflicts created between the capitalist economic order and world of human relationships, and the emotional development and fulfilment of both women and men. In this way questions about care work have become questions for everyone (pp. 220-6).

Having analysed what we take to be the character of the equality movement, and having identified some of its key ideological tasks, it remains to be asked what organisational forms and methods of action egalitarians should adopt. This is of course an enormous question, and our concern here is only to raise a number of key strategic issues for the movement. The central theme of our discussion is that the equality movement can benefit from a 'strategic pluralism' that recognises its diversity and makes a virtue out of the range of strategies pursued by different groups and organisations.

As we have suggested, the equality movement is structured as a network of groupings that are always free to cooperate but never forced to do so. Although this may well fall short of the level of coordination that some egalitarians wish for, it stems from the fact that the equality agenda is a complex mixture of aims that will inevitably be given different priorities by different groups and that political action is an uncertain process in which activists inevitably make different practical judgements. So the loosely coordinated structure of the equality movement - one aspect of what we call its strategic pluralism - should be seen not as a weakness, but as a strength (pp. 229-32).

This diverse, plural character of the equality movement generates a certain tension between many of its elements and political parties, since political parties are by their nature more or less centralised and have rarely brought about radical egalitarian change. Yet the evidence shows that parties do matter, and that governments of the left do enact more egalitarian policies than those of the right. Should egalitarians therefore support established

left-wing parties, despite their failings? Or are they better to stay resolutely outside party politics? Perhaps the solution is to try to develop new, radically egalitarian parties? Each of these strategies has a long and chequered history, and it would be rash to claim that any of them is best for all circumstances. The most that can be said at a general level is that there will often be a case for pursuing all three strategies at the same time, relying on the varying judgements of different equality activists to keep all three in play (pp. 232-8).

Like most social movements, the equality movement has both radical and moderate components, with a fair amount of tension between them. Does one of these sides have right on its side, or is the truth more complicated? To clarify the question, it is worth distinguishing two kinds of radicalism, ideological and tactical. Ideologically, the key issue is not to resolve the debate between moderates and radicals but to avoid bitter conflict between them. Tactically, there is again more to be gained of working both inside and outside the system than by concentrating on either approach. Disruptive action can help tactical moderates because it demonstrates the depth of the grievances and injustices they hope to redress. Conversely, disruption usually achieves most when it has allies operating within conventional structures of power (pp. 238-43).

A final strategic question for the equality movement is the relationship between egalitarian ends and means. The equality movement is defined by its principles: it cannot expect to achieve its aims by ignoring them. In particular, we need to bear in mind the central dimensions of equality in thinking about acceptable political strategies. Equality of respect and recognition is, first of all, a principle that we have to apply to the other members of the equality movement, though it also has implications for how we treat our opponents. Equality of resources means that we need to look seriously at the distribution of resources within the equality movement itself, trying to share our material and social resources and to avoid over-dependence on the state. Equality of love, care and solidarity reminds us that there is a world

of difference between being involved in a group or organisation that enhances the relationships among its members and one that subordinates these to political goals. Equality of power calls on us not to ignore the power inequalities in our own groups and organisations. Equality of working and learning warns us that it is no good reproducing within the movement a division of labour between people who do interesting, rewarding work that develops their capabilities and others who take on the drudgery. Nor should the equality movement rely on a gendered division of labour for care work - whether done in households or in the movement itself (pp. 243-6).

Conclusion

In this article we have outlined the central reasons for pursuing the project of Equality Studies and some of the thinking we have done within an Equality Studies framework. We have tried to show that a multi-dimensional conceptual framework, applied to a set of key social contexts and articulating the concerns of subordinate social groups, can be a fruitful way of putting the idea of equality into practice. Finally, we have addressed some central questions about how to effect egalitarian social change. We hope that this very condensed account of our work will make you want to look at its more substantial presentation in *Equality: From Theory to Action.* But much more than this, we hope that it will encourage you to view your own academic and practical work in a new light: as contributions to the academic project of equality studies and to the broader political project of the equality movement.